

Kyodan

News Letter

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Who Is My Neighbor?

by KOMORI Taiji

I am a blind instructor of English at Obirin Jr. College in Tokyo.

This spring, for two weeks, I had an opportunity to visit five cities in Southeast Asia with my wife Tomoko and three other Christians. In that time, I visited Singapore, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Bangkok and Chieng Mai in Thailand, and Hongkong. The trip was a project planned by the Japan Council of Christian Evangelism for the Blind (JCCEB) as part of its 25th anniversary celebration. The main purpose of visiting these countries was to establish new and good Christian friendships among blind persons and to discuss common problems of the blind. I was able to talk with many top blind leaders and volunteers about a lot of our problems. Christian activities were the main topics of our conversations.

In each country, I visited schools for the blind, vocational training centers for the blind, rehabilitation centers for the blind, and associations of the blind. I have learned much about the situations of blind persons in Southeast Asia through these talks. All the facilities I visited this time were quite good. The methods of education and vocational training were very good. But blind persons are facing a lot of problems which are very difficult to solve. Among them are poor education, lack of social security, job scarcity and marriage problems. In these countries influenced by idol worship, blind Christians are a minority; yet their

roles are important. Those who are Christians are trying to do something about those difficulties.

It might be disgraceful for a family in one of these countries to have a blind family member. For this reason blind children are often hidden by their parents. They often do not come out until they are over thirty. Consequently, it is impossible for us to count the number of blind persons in the countries I visited.

How do they live? They work either as telephone operators or as factory workers. But the majority of blind persons in Southeast Asia cannot work at present. They are not accepted by their communities.

I feel certain that my trip to Southeast Asia was successful. By visiting these countries and talking with many new friends, I discovered a new world. They are my real neighbors whom I had forgotten to think of as neighbors.

Komori Taiji led one of three groups visiting Asian countries under the sponsorship of the JCCEB. In addition to his wife he was accompanied by Rev. SHIOMI Mitsuo (Kyoto) and his 13-year old daughter, Haruko, and Rev. Tom Paton, Kyodan missionary (Tokyo). Rev. AOKI Masaru led a second group visiting Korea and the Philippines while the Komori team was in Southeast Asia. Another group, led by Rev. KOBAYASHI Takeshi went to Korea last November.

BOARD OF PENSIONS ESTABLISHED

by AKIYAMA Norie

improve the services related to pension payments and the management of pension funds.

An independent Board of Pensions is the fruit of efforts begun in 1973 when the Kyodan Pension Fund was started and contributions sought in Japan and overseas to replace the funds wiped out by the inflation of the early postwar years. The Kyodan is deeply grateful for the support of North American churches which has made the new Board of Pensions a practical possibility.

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At its 19th General Assembly, November 1976, the Kyodan approved the establishment of an independent Board of Pensions. The new board began its work in an office on the 5th floor of the Japan Christian Center at the start of the fiscal year beginning April 1, 1977. KAWANA Keizo, retired Kyodan Treasurer, is the executive of the board; AKIYAMA Norie, its chairperson. One purpose of this new arrangement is to clearly differentiate the management of pension funds from the ordinary transactions of the Kyodan treasury. Another intention is to

The Board of Pensions (continued)

North American churches have already contributed nearly \$550,000 of the \$750,000 requested.

Funds now in hand total nearly \$3.4 million. Of this 51% is the participatory pension fund into which regular payments are made by pastors and their churches. The remainder, of which one third is the contributions from North American churches, makes up the gratuities fund from which monthly payments are made to persons who retired before the participatory plan was inaugurated in 1964. This year gratuity

payments have been raised to \$80 a month for single people and \$104 for couples. A surviving widow of a pastor who retired before 1964 receives \$46 a month. In view of the present cost of living in Japan, these payments amount to only a pittance, but they do help.

The Board of Pensions is keenly aware of its responsibility to raise the level of payments so as to more adequately fulfill the obligation of all the Kyodan churches and members toward the elderly ministers who have labored so long and so faithfully. (See KNL #87, Oct. 1974)

CHURCH SCHOOL CHILDREN VISIT NEPAL

Nepali church school children in a tiny church in Amp Pipal village on the top of a giant mountain, located seven hours by bus and two days on foot (no other transportation) from Kathmandu, had an exciting Palm Sunday worship service (actually on Saturday) with a group of Japanese church school children and teachers from Tokyo.

Our ten-day study-tour in Nepal for church school people was planned by the NCC Division of Christian Education in consultation with missionary-doctor IWAMURA Noboru of the United Mission to Nepal, who has been working there over 15 years sponsored by the Japan Overseas Christian Medical Co-operative Service (JOCS). Ten boys and girls from Kunitachi, Asagaya, Komae, Inagi and other churches, mostly in the Tokyo-Yokohama area, and eight teachers, including Mr. SUGIMOTO Seiji of the Japan Bible Society and Mr. MIDZUNO of Aoyama Gakuin, made up the group. From the youngest, OZASA Haruhiko, 10, up to Mr. KAWAKAMI Takeshi, 70, a kindergarten principal, all joined in one group and safely arrived at the Kathmandu airport at noon on Mar. 30 after one night's stay in Bangkok, Thailand.

Their first surprise in Nepal was the complete freedom which cows and oxen possess, even on the main street of the city, while Christian ministers are strictly controlled and cannot even preach openly. It is said that anybody, even a foreign traveler, who hurts a cow (thought of as holy) must be jailed by state law.

With special care in planning on the part of Dr. Iwamura, group members spent four days divided into two teams: "hikers" for the Amp Pipal trek and "lookers" for a study-visit around the Kathmandu area. The Amp Pipal team left Kathmandu in the early morning of the very next day.

The Kathmandu-team was welcomed by Rev. and Mrs. NEUPANI, who once studied at Tsurukawa Rural Institute, and by members of the "Okaa-chan Home" of Mrs. IWAMURA.

Guided by Dr. Iwamura himself the team visited schools, a hospital, and other points of interest.

At one school they visited, some boys who were playing soccer kindly invited the visiting children to join in. Two girls willingly joined and everybody enjoyed that. People said that it may be the very first time for girls to play soccer in Nepal.

The Amp Pipal-team with Mrs. Iwamura, Jack, from the "Okaa-chan Home," Mr. AZUMA and a Sherpa as guides, and two porters walked four days through the countryside passing rivers and climbing mountains and hills on the way to and from Amp Pipal, where the United Mission in Nepal office, the church and UMN hospital are located.

The simple quiet life of the country people--living with cows and sheep, sleeping on the clay floor under a leaf-covered roof, with no electricity, no gas and no running water--reminded me of village life in Judea 2,000 years ago.

Though our live-in experiences were too brief to fully analyze the "culture-shock," at least the "food-shock" was directly experienced by having typical Nepali meals twice a day and no breakfast. People whom we met on the way, however, were exceptionally kind, innocent and friendly; quite different from people in big cities like Tokyo. Whomever they met they greeted with "Namaste" (Good-day, or Good-by in Nepali) while joining their hands. All of us, children and adults, responded with "Namaste" and a very warm hearted smile. TAGUCHI, 14, spoke about his happiness at the meeting in the Amp Pipal Church.

With a lot of new energy the children and teachers returned to their homes and their home churches. A reunion to share experiences and evaluation is expected in May.

The NCC Division of Church Education plans to repeat the program next year.

by MIDZUNO Makoto

COMMISSION on MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATIONS DECLARES STANCE

Inheritor of a long line of sharp controversy, the new Commission on Ministerial Qualifications held its first meeting Feb. 7-8 to get organized and chart its course for the two-year period of the 19th General Assembly. Electing KAWATANI Takeo (Hokkai District Moderator) as chairperson and YODA Koichi (pastor of Fujisawa Church, Kanagawa District) as clerk, the commission proceeded to tackle the basic issues related to the ministerial qualification examinations. One of its first challenges came in the form of a public letter (Kyodan Shimpō, Apr. 2, 1977) requesting a public answer to questions about the basic policies of the commission. The fundamental question is how to reconcile a pluralistic stance of openness to minority voices, on one hand, with the statement that the examinations will be based on the Kyodan's Confession of Faith, on the other hand.

On Apr. 12, the commission met with representatives pressing this issue and others related to it. The result was a public statement affirming:

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AOYAMA GAKUIN CLOSES THEOLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

The Theological Department of Aoyama Gakuin University was officially discontinued on Mar. 30, 1977, by action of the Aoyama Gakuin Board of Trustees. The Aoyama Theological Department, one of the seven Kyodan-related seminaries, had put an end to recruiting new students in the spring of 1973.

However, the status of the four remaining theological faculty members is still uncertain, pending final action by the Board of Trustees. The four faculty involved are SEKITA Hiroo, KIDA Kenichi, NISHIMURA Toshiaki, and MIDZUNO Makoto. One reason this decision has not been finalized is that a petition signed by over 4,000 persons was presented to the Board of Trustees by graduates of the department, appealing for the continuation of the department and a guarantee of faculty status for the remaining teachers.

The Board of Trustees made its initial decision to close down the theological department in November 1972.

The reasons given by the Board of Trustees at that time included the following:

- 1) for the past several years, only one or

- the commission's duty to the General Assembly and the church as a whole to uphold the integrity of the selection of the future pastors of the church
- recognition that the Kyodan's identity as an evangelical church is grounded in the word of God found in the Bible and expressed in the Confession of Faith
- that the ideas and Christian convictions of the clergy are not individual matters only, but rooted in the traditions and faith of the historical church all are called to serve
- that in a united church it is important to recognize and treasure the varied gifts brought to the union by each of the merging streams of tradition.

Chairperson Kawatani is hopeful that mutual understanding and trust can be recovered and that ministerial candidates who have refused to take the examinations can be reconciled. At the end of March there were 40 applicants for the examination to be held May 31-June 2, 1977.

two graduates have gone into direct evangelism, 2) some theological students and faculty aided the student protest movement; 3) during 1971 the deficit for the department came to ¥35,000,000. In response to this, Assoc. Prof. Sekita, in an interview with the Kyodan Shimpō, stated that the immediate reason for the discontinuation of the department was the situation which arose after the Chancellor vetoed the admission of three students from Tokyo Union Theological Seminary (TUTS) who had passed the Aoyama Gakuin entrance exams after refusing to enroll in TUTS in protest against the calling in of riot troops to take down student-erected barricades at TUTS in March 1970.

Although the days of direct, and often violent, confrontation seem to have passed, the Kyodan is called upon to seek new ways of binding up the wounds and moving on to a time of healing in which true reconciliation can take place. The issues raised by the Aoyama Gakuin dispute are directly related to the wider questions about theological education and ministerial qualification currently being debated within the Kyodan, and therefore cannot be ignored.

JAPAN-KOREA SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE APPEALS TO DISTRICTS

The Kyodan Special Committee for Japan-Korea Solidarity recently reported on its first year of activities since it's establishment in Feb. 1976 for the purpose of "providing a responsible agency in the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) for taking up and becoming involved with the dual issues of Japan-Korea relationships and the Korean minority in Japan, as well as to carry on exchanges and deepen solidarity with the churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ)."

In keeping with this purpose the committee reports that it has focused on the two areas of Japan-Korea relationships and the rights of the Korean minority in Japan. With the continued interest, prayers, and cooperation of churches and individuals throughout Japan, they are looking forward to deepening the exchanges with churches in Korea and the KCCJ so as to strengthen the bonds of solidarity with all those involved in this common struggle.

The Committee has presented the following proposals for consideration by the Kyodan district assemblies to be held this spring.

1) We propose that the districts pass resolutions in support of the struggle of Korean Christians based upon their faith and conscience.

In order to restore freedom and human rights, we must continue to appeal to international opinion for support of the struggle for democratization, along with encouraging those directly involved in the struggle who are already in prison or facing prosecution.

The committee has sent protest telegrams to the Korean and Japanese governments, and telegrams of support to the families of defendants. Some districts have already taken specific action and we hope other districts will join in expressions of solidarity during the coming year.

2) We are planning a campaign to send cards to those who have been detained in Korea. First, we will make a list of the defendants sentenced for signing the March First (1976) Declaration of

Democratic National Salvation. Postcards will be made and sent in a concerted campaign. Secondly, we are preparing a prayer list of all those detained since 1974. We are asking your cooperation in carrying out this campaign.

3) The issue of human rights for the Koreans in Japan is a national problem. Please take notice of the problems in your own area and make plans to deal with them at your own district assembly. Through sharing and studying the information sent in from all over Japan, we are hoping to become aware of the location of problems not yet publicized. This will help the Special Committee with its preparation of a case study report and guide for action.

4) We need your support. When this committee was established, we appealed for ¥1,000,000 (\$3,650) to carry out our activities. By the end of October, 1976, we had received ¥1,400,000 (\$5,165). With such a good response, the Kyodan Executive Committee approved our second fundraising campaign of ¥2,000,000 (\$7,300) which was launched last November. As of the end of March, we have received ¥580,000 (\$2,145), and need your continued support to reach our goal.

Finally, we call upon our local churches throughout Japan to join us as we begin this new year of activities, which include plans for concrete exchanges with the KCCJ, sending representatives to visit churches in Korea, and holding a national Conference of those involved with these issues.

This appeal to the districts ends on a note of repentance, recalling that "The history of Japan's relations with Korea has been a history of discrimination and oppression, followed by forced assimilation coupled with anti-alien chauvinism. Finally, ten years after the Kyodan made its Confession of War Responsibility, we have begun to consciously deal with this history. The Special Committee asks for your prayers, cooperation and words of support as we strive to put into practice the spirit of this Confession."

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The Commission on Faith and Order has now elected Rev. SUGIHARA Tasuku (Nishi-Chugoku District) as chairperson and Rev. MIYOSHI Hiromu (Osaka District) as secretary.